

“LITTLE PITCHERS HAVE BIG EARS”
THE INTRICATE WORLD OF CHILDREN AND PROVERBS

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The titular proverb from the 16th century, not particularly current these days, used to be employed by parents to signal each other that their little children (pitchers) were listening in on something that was not meant for their ears (handles on the pitchers). The assumption was that children could not possibly understand this metaphorical message and, judging by some experiments I have conducted with youngsters as well as my university students, it is indeed a proverb whose hidden meaning is difficult to comprehend. But the proverb also implies that the children are good and keen listeners to what adults are saying, and sooner or later they will catch on at decoding the metaphors of proverbs whose imagery is less obscure. This begs the question at what age children become comfortable in processing proverbs in their mind, whether it is worthwhile to teach them some of the most popular proverbs, and what educational tools exist in addition to normal discourse to aid in this developmental process. Once children are introduced to metaphorical proverbs that relate to their very existence, their interest in dealing with this type of indirect language is awakened. There is no doubt that children can handle proverbs at an earlier age than has long been thought possible, but much more study needs to be undertaken on how children employ proverbs once they have become part of their natural vocabulary.

Ever since the Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget published his seminal study on *The Language and Thought of the Child* (1926) with its influential chapter “Some Peculiarities of Verbal Understanding in the Child Between the Ages of Nine and Eleven” (Piaget 1959: 127-161), scholars have struggled with the question at what age children are capable of processing, understanding, and employing metaphorical proverbs. There are those who maintained with Piaget that youngsters are incapable of dealing with proverbs until at least twelve years of age (Billow 1975, Cometa 1976, Douglas and Peel 1979), but this view began to be questioned by the end of the 1970s by primarily psycholinguists employing various innovative research methods, such as placing proverbs in a pictorial context (Honeck, Sowry, Voegtler 1978) or asking children to choose an appropriate proverb from a list of ten to end a vignette, to pair proverbs of similar meaning, and to paraphrase them rather than confronting them with a multiple choice proverbs test (Resnick 1977 and 1982). Especially Marilyn Nippold and her colleagues have advanced such developmentally oriented studies on proverb comprehension by children and adolescents, arguing that it is of paramount importance that proverbs are presented in a contextualized form (Nippold 1985 and 1988, Nippold et al. 1988 and 1998). Such carefully executed investigations of various proverb tasks with statistical analyses have amply shown that children by the age of ten (fourth graders) are certainly ready to comprehend proverbs, that is at least two years earlier in their development than what Piaget had postulated.

The same has been shown to be true for the related proverbial expressions or general idioms (Gibbs 1987, Lodge and Leach 1975, Prinz 1983)

While psycholinguists have done impressive work in advancing knowledge about how children's minds process and understand metaphorical proverbs, they have basically ignored the question of when children begin using proverbs once they have become acquainted with them. Folklorist Catherine Hudson, in her short paper on "Traditional Proverbs as Perceived by Children from an Urban Environment" (1972), tried to deal with proverbs in actual use, but she was able to observe only that while her fourth and fifth graders could deal with proverbs cited by adults they "never reached the point where they used proverbs in their conversation" (Hudson 1972: 17). But in this regard it is important to point to Judith Pasamanick's unfortunately ignored dissertation *The Proverb Moves the Mind: Abstraction and Metaphor in Children Six-Nine* (1982) with folklorist Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett being on the thesis committee at Yeshiva University in New York City. She took the time to set up discursive situations with 48 children in which she, as the investigator, would discuss a given proverb to the point that they understood its meaning, were able to talk about it, and also put it to use. It took many weeks of serious transcription work and detailed analysis to show by realistic verbal exchanges that these youngsters could manage proverbs. Altering the proverb that "Talk does not cook rice" for a summary of sorts to "Talk *Does* Cook Rice: Proverb Abstraction through Social Interaction" (1983), she used a most fitting metaphor for her seminal work that shows that a narrative approach to proverb understanding and use is better than employing proverbs tests without contexts. It was a special pleasure and privilege for me when Judith Pasamanick and her husband visited me in Vermont. Our discussions resulted in the publication of her paper "Watched Pots *Do* Boil: Proverb Interpretation through Contextual Illustration" (1985) in *Proverbium*. The recorded transcripts of her discussions with the children of such proverbs as "You can't have your cake and eat it too," "Talk does not cook rice," "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush," "Don't count your chickens before they hatch," "You can't unscramble eggs," "You can't teach an old dog new tricks," "The early bird catches the worm," and others are most revealing of the social and ethical aspects of these discussions among young peers, and they are most certainly unique in the scholarship of children and proverbs. In this regard let me also point out the fascinating scholarship by the Finnish folklorist and paremiologist Liisa Granbom-Herranen who has investigated life stories of adults who recall in their narratives what pedagogical roles proverbs played as behavioral models once they had learned them as children (Granbom-Herranen 2008, 2009, 2011). Personal narratives can shed much light on lasting effects of proverbs encountered in youth.

Regrettably, Judith Pasamanick did not become a paremiologically oriented folklorist but rather entered the professorial profession in the College of Education at Columbia University where she invited Pack Carnes, known for his fable and joke scholarship, and me to teach a folklore summer course – an unforgettably rewarding experience. In any case, a third section of her dissertation deals with "Pedagogic Applications" (322-351) where she discusses how her social-interactive mode of proverb elicitation and employment can be used in a

constructive way in the classroom of an ethnically diverse group of children. Without wanting to be prescriptive, she argues that proverbs can facilitate the discussion of ethical values by giving the children the opportunity to analyze their implied wisdom. And it is with gladness and appreciation that I acknowledge here the influence that the pioneering work of my friend had on my own involvement with proverbs and children. She was correct more than thirty years ago, and she will remain so since there is absolutely nothing wrong with teaching children at least the most commonly known proverbs. The question is, of course, how to accomplish this task that ought to include Pasamanick's open-mined discursive approach.

As luck would have it, I received a generous grant from the Templeton Foundation in 1999 to develop teaching strategies for acquainting fourth-grade students with wisdom in the form of proverbs. I teamed up with their teacher, Deborah Holmes, and we put together a number of teaching units that proved most beneficial to the youngsters who reacted with spirited enthusiasm that perhaps only children of the age between nine and ten are capable of exhibiting in a classroom situation. For the *Character Development and Ethics Unit*, we covered proverbs like "Where there is a will, there is a way," "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again," "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," and "Actions speak louder than words." During the *United Nations' Unit*, we employed proverbs like "The pen is mightier than the sword," "Different strokes for different folks," "Love thy neighbor as thyself," "United we stand, divided we fall," and "A house divided cannot stand." And during the *Science/Math Units* we dealt with such proverbs as "A stitch in time saves nine," "Two heads are better than one," "A rolling stone gathers no moss," and "A miss is as good as a mile." Altogether we covered 150 proverbs during the school year chosen from the established paremiological minimum of 300 Anglo-American proverbs (Haas 2008, Mieder 1992). It was important to us to teach only those proverbs that are definitely current in our modern society, and we made sure that we included modern proverbs like "Garbage in, garbage out," "There is no such thing as a free lunch," and "One picture is worth a thousand words." One of the criticisms that I would level at some of the psycholinguistic studies is that they at times use proverbs that are not particularly current, to wit "Scalded cats fear even cold water," "A caged bird longs for the clouds," "The restless sleeper blames the bed," "The pretty shoe often pinches the foot," and "A mouse may help a lion" (Duthie et al. 2008: 162-163).

In any case, I traveled to the Elementary School at Milton, Vermont about every three weeks with my slide projector for a number of school years, telling my university students before going that they better be well prepared for the next lesson if they wanted to come even close to the excitement and eagerness of these wonderful young learners. They loved my slides from art, cartoons, comics, advertisement, headlines, etc., and they had absolutely no problems understanding so-called anti-proverbs, i.e., intentional humorous or satirical manipulations of the proverbs they had learned. There were also exciting projects for the children like writing essays about a proverb, translating the proverbial metaphors into drawings, acting out proverbs, etc. We have described all of this in our book "*Children and*

Proverbs Speak the Truth": Teaching Proverbial Wisdom to Fourth Graders (Mieder and Holmes 2000). Our joint efforts with these incredible youngsters got into the papers, and we also had a half-hour interview with NPR that aired numerous times over the years as part of its "Humankind" series. But speaking of the book that includes forty proverbial drawings, perhaps the most exciting aspect are the answers of the students to the following questions of a questionnaire handed out at the end of the school year. Let me cite some of the questions with but a couple of answers here:

What is your favorite proverb?

Actions speak louder than words.
Every cloud has a silver lining. (p. 197)

Describe a situation when a proverb you learned this year helped you make a good decision.

Don't judge a book but its cover helped me read a great book. It had an ugly green cover and a boring name but "The Lost Bear" was a great book.
My little sister and I were about to cross a street without looking and I stopped and said look before you leap. (p. 198)

Which proverb would help you if there was trouble on the playground?

Two wrongs don't make a right.
Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. (p. 204)

Which proverb would you like to remember for the rest of your life? Why?

Time flies because you have to make life the fullest because it is so short once you think about it.
There is no such thing as a free lunch. Because we need to learn that if we want something we have to work for it or earn it. (p. 205)

Did learning and discussing proverbs change your thinking or behavior in any way? Yes – No.

Yes. Learning and discussing proverbs changed my behavior in how I thought. I think with more maturity now that I have learned proverbs.
Yes. It changed my thinking about the way everything works. (p. 207)

Would you like to continue to learn proverbs? Yes – No.

Yes. Because they are very interesting and can help you in life.
Yes. Because proverbs are like morals. The more you know the less you make bad decisions. (p. 208)

Our book has seventeen such answers to these and other questions, and in my International Proverb Archives, I have many more from other years of teaching these kids. This is material that the psycholinguistic studies mentioned above—

except for those by Judith Pasamanick—do not have and thus do not consider. There is no doubt that much more contextualized field research is necessary to really understand how children at a young age relate to proverbs.

The fact that proverbs can be taught and that they might have a positive influence on the character development of youngsters is nothing new. They have long been taught as ready-made bits of wisdom or at least as generalized expressions of experiences and observations as can be seen from early educational collections, school-books from the Middle Ages, translation exercises in foreign language classes, etc. (Mieder 2009, Orkin 1978). And let us not forget Benjamin Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanacks* (1733-1758) and his infamous essay “The Way to Wealth” (1758) that ushered in the Puritan ethics with its 105 proverbs! Can't you just imagine those children during the past two centuries who sat at the breakfast table and drank their milk out of a cup standing on a plate that both are inscribed with such proverbs as “Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise,” “Laziness travels so slowly, that poverty soon overtakes him,” or “He that by the plough would thrive, himself must either hold or drive”? In addition to such proverbial inscriptions these dishes often carried the label “Franklin's Maxims” – no wonder that his name became attached to so many proverbs when in fact he only coined very few, to wit “There is sleeping enough in the grave” and “Three removes are as bad as a fire” (Mieder 2004b: 216-224). These Franklin mugs and plates have long since become collector's items, and my wife has spent up to \$300 a piece to assemble a dozen of these rare curiosities for me as very special and much-appreciated presents (McClinton 1980, Riley 1991). We have modern lists of proverbs that serve similar educational purposes, as for example the one in *The Dictionary of Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (Hirsch et al. 1988: 46-57, Mieder 1992: 195-197). E.D. Hirsch has also published *What Your Fourth Grader Needs to Know* with a list of sayings and phrases (Hirsch 2005: 57-65) that are explained by way of short statements and concise educational dialogues, as for example:

Birds of a feather flock together

We use this saying [proverb] to mean that similar people, or people who have similar interests, like to be with each other.

“Those guys always eat lunch together,” Jenny said, nodding toward a group of boys in the cafeteria.

“Yeah,” said June, “They're on the same baseball team and they love to talk about mitts and bats and home runs.”

Jenny nodded. “Birds of a feather flock together!” (Hirsch 2005: 58)

But nowhere in these two books does he explain how these texts were chosen. It certainly would have been appropriate to have consulted proverb scholars to help select those texts (old and modern) that are current today. Jay Mechling has dealt with the issue of oversimplifying the educational and cultural value and significance of proverbs in his eye-opening article on “Cheaters Never Prosper” and Other Lies Adults Tell Kids: Proverbs and the Culture Wars over Character” (2004). As he points out, there are plenty of inappropriate proverbs, and the mere

memorization of "good" proverbs – even they can be put to negative use due to their polyfunctionality, polysituativity, and polysemanticity (Mieder 2004b: 132) – does not make a good child let alone adult. And yet, at least some knowledge and understanding of proverbs is part of cultural literacy and there is no harm in acquainting children with them without making absolute rules out of their all-too-human limitations, as is immediately obvious from such contrasting pairs as "Absence makes the heart grow fonder" vs. "Out of sight, out of mind" and "Look before you leap" vs. "He who hesitates is lost." A proverb at the right time in the right place is just fine, but the proverbial caveats "Nothing in excess" and "Everything in moderation" also apply to the use of proverbs.

Now that educational books have been mentioned, it is time to take a look at richly illustrated small books for children that have been published over the years to serve as enjoyable early introductions to the rich treasure trove of proverbs (Mieder et al. 1992). They are clearly intended to teach children proverbs, just as other children's books acquaint youngsters with fables, fairy tales, legends, myths, etc. as part of cultural literacy. Judging by my university students who enroll in my lecture course on "'Big Fish Eat Little Fish': The Nature and Politics of Proverbs" every fall (Mieder 2015), I can honestly and without riding my proverbial hobby-horse state that they would well have benefitted from one of these charming books. It is always amazing to me at the beginning of the course that they have plenty of difficulties filling out a questionnaire with fifty common proverbs for which I ask them to complete either the first or the second half. Even though I have selected especially common proverbs from the Anglo-American paremiological minimum, many students cannot complete the partial queues for such standard proverbs as "A stitch in time saves nine," "Cobbler stick to your last," "A miss is as good as a mile," "There is nothing new under the sun," "You never miss the water until the well runs dry," and "A burnt child dreads the fire." But they all know the "fish"-proverb used in the catch-title of my course as becomes clear during the introductory lecture that deals with a diachronic survey of this proverb with references from literature, politics, the mass media, and about fifty slides of illustrations from Pieter Bruegel all the way to modern cartoons and advertisements (Mieder 1987: 178-228, and 2004b: 34-43). At that time I also show them that ever popular children's book *Swimmy* (1963) by Leo Lionni that on a few beautifully illustrated pages first shows how a big fish swallows little fish, then how a special little fish starts organizing his peers into the shape of a large fish – I call it the solidarity fish – and how that unified creature chases the big fish away. More than fifty years after its first appearance this book is still on the market in numerous languages, and many of my students remember it from their childhood. In comparison to other children's books on proverbs that I have collected over the years, this is particularly memorable since it is basically a pictorial story with but little writing that teaches youngsters about just one important proverb about power, greed, rapacity that unfortunately is part of human nature that can, at least at times, be overcome by unified efforts.

My interest in children's books on proverbs – besides my obsession with collecting everything proverbial for my ever expanding International Proverb Archives – began when, some thirty years ago, I came across the sixteen-page

booklet *Old Proverbs with New Pictures* by Lizzie Lawson published without a date by the Merrimack Publishing Corporation in New York City. Realizing that this treasure of beautifully illustrated children depicting the proverbs "Little boats keep near shore, big ships may venture more," "Half a loaf is better than no bread," "There's many a slip twixt the cup and the lip," "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush," "It's an ill wind that blows no body good," "You may lead a horse to water but you cannot make him drink," "The more haste, the less speed," "Birds of a feather flock together," "Never buy a pig in a poke," "Out of the frying pan into the fire," "Too much of a good thing is good for nothing," "Tis a poor heart that never rejoices," "The greatest strokes make not the sweetest music," "Too many cooks spoil the broth," and "Coming events cast their shadows before." I never succeeded in finding out more about this slender publication, but I have discovered the fabulous book from which these illustrations were taken. It is *Old Proverbs with New Pictures* (London: Cassell, Petter, Calpin & Co.) that on 64 pages contains 35 proverb illustrations by the British children's book artist Lizzie Lawson (1867-1920) and little explanatory poems by the unknown British poet Clara Mateaux that were deleted from the small reprint. Here is at least one example, albeit without the illustration:

It is no use crying over spilt milk
 Do not fret
 For fretting ended,
 Never bowl
 Or platter mended,
 Bind that finger,
 Wipe that tear,
 Next, more careful
 Step my dear,
 And remember
 What I say,
 Milk, once spilt,
 Is spilt for aye. (p. 22)

Admittedly, such verses would not come across to today's children, and the illustrations are also dated for modern youngsters. Nevertheless, it is one of the most splendid children's proverb books that definitely deserves to be reprinted as a unique curiosity with plenty of entertaining value. And paremiologists like myself will, of course, also enjoy the fact that Lord John Russell's famous proverb definition "The wit of one, the wisdom of many" (1823) appears – albeit in reverse order – underneath the cover picture of five children.

For the past three decades, I have searched for other proverb books intended for children by spending time in the children's section of bookstores, asking shopkeepers for possible leads, and also trying the internet. While I am excited about the ten additional books that I have been able to purchase during the past decades, it is a regrettably small harvest. Proverb collections as such – popular and scholarly – can actually be found in general bookstores, and I would think that

well-illustrated children's books on proverbs could conquer their market as well. And it would be desirable that such books would include particularly popular traditional proverbs as well as more modern proverbs like "Go big or go home" or "The second mouse gets the cheese" (Doyle et al. 2012). In any case, what follows is a short survey of the children's proverb books that I possess:

Hughes, Shirley (ill.). 1977. *Make Hay While the Sun Shines. A Book of Proverbs*. Chosen by Alison M. Abel. London: Faber and Faber. 48 pp.; rpt. London: Faber and Faber, 1998. 40 pp.

The book with its proverbial title includes 33 pen and ink drawings of children acting out standard proverbs like "Many hands make light work," "Don't swap horses in mid-stream," and "Let sleeping dogs lie." The proverbs are cited at the bottom of the page with very short explanatory comments. I was especially pleased to see the proverb "A stitch in time saves nine" illustrated together with the concise explanation: "If you put something right as soon as it goes wrong, you won't have so much trouble later" (p.7). This is one of the proverbs that not a single student in my proverb class this past fall knew! Little wonder perhaps, since nobody appears to be mending clothes any longer. I personally have fond memories seeing my mother stitch the holes in our socks when we grew up after the Second World War. Since the proverb obviously need not refer only to mending clothes, it still has plenty of good use in our modern society and could well still be taught and learned.

Hughes, Shirley (ill.). 1980. *"Over the Moon": A Book of Sayings*. London: Faber and Faber. 48 pp.; rpt. London: Faber and Faber, 1998. 40 pp.

Having had success with her first proverb book, Shirley Hughes brought out a companion volume depicting 47 proverbial expressions in pen and ink drawings (sometimes two on a page). The proverbial expressions are once again printed at the bottom of the page with a very short explanatory comment beneath. Some of the depicted phrases are "up the creek with a paddle," "a bull in a china shop," "casting pearls before swine," and "hitting the nail on the head." Such metaphorical expressions literally call out to be illustrated, and I was especially interested to see that Shirley Hughes included the proverbial expression "Being a dog in the manger" that I have traced back to classical times (Mieder 2011). The pen and ink drawing makes its meaning perfectly clear, but the explanatory comment "Refusing to give up something you don't really want to someone who needs it" (p. 6) helps to understand the metaphor. None of my university students knew this expression and not surprisingly so, since fables, where the metaphor comes from, are not covered much in school any longer. And yet, it is such a great image, and I wish we could maintain it since it still fits perfectly to human behavior in the modern age.

Fraser, Betty (ill.). 1990. *First Things First: An Illustrated Collection of Sayings – Useful and Familiar for Children*. New York: Harper & Row. 32 pp.

While the two books by Shirley Hughes probably would not appeal to youngster these days because of the lack of colorful illustrations, this book by

Betty Fraser presents plenty of them with children from various ethnic groups. It includes two dozen well-known proverbs for which it explains in words and pictures what they mean and when to use them. The pictures are full of good humor, and they are entitled by an introductory statement with one or two possible proverbial answers interspersed on the page, as for example:

What to say when you are the first
 The early bird catches the worm.
 First come, first served.
 First things first. (p. 14)

The accompanying picture shows a bird outside of the kitchen eating a worm and a child sitting at the table as the first family member being served breakfast by the mother. There is also a little dog wanting to eat and thinking to himself "First things first". This book is clearly meant to teach children proverbs, and my proverb students would be able to explain to the little girl that the proverb "First come, first served" is actually a medieval Latin legal proverb that relates to the miller. The customary law was that the farmer who would arrive at the mill first would have his grain ground first. The proverb was translated into the vernacular languages, with Geoffrey Chaucer still alluding to this practice with "Whoso that first to mille comth, first grynt". But by 1599 the truncated variant "First come, first served" already appeared in England and it has long displaced the longer version (Mieder 2004b: 43-52). A child does not need to know this, of course, but this example shows that there is much to learn about proverbs for the inquisitive mind, even at a young age. I am not sure if I would have included "A trouble shared is a trouble halved" that is not really current, but I am glad that there is a two-page spread on the golden rule "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." The twice repeated text and the two series of three pictures each make the meaning of this basic rule of civil and humane behavior perfectly clear to the young readers and viewers.

Kneen, Maggie (ill.). 1992. *Too Many Cooks ... and Other Proverbs*. New York: Green Tiger Press. 26 pp.

This is a beautifully illustrated book with all the characters being animals. It presents twenty-five very well-known proverbs, with some proverbs like "Birds of a feather flock together" getting a two-page illustration, while another two-page spread presents a horse and buggy at a stable with five proverbs written next to appropriate place: "If wishes were horses, beggars would ride," "Never look a gift horse in the mouth," "Don't put the cart before the horse," "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink," and "Don't lock the stable door after the horse has bolted." The first and last proverb might be a bit difficult for a small child to grasp. For parents who might have difficulties there are two pages at the end of the book with short explanations, to wit for the "stable"-proverb: "It is useless to take precautions after an accident has happened when they should have been taken before." In any case, this is a charming and entertaining book for very

young children, but it is, as the others mentioned thus far, unfortunately out of print.

Hurwitz, Johanna. 1994. *A Word to the Wise and Other Proverbs*. Illustrations by Robert Rayevsky. New York: Morrow Junior Books. 32 pp.

As stated on the dust cover of this book, its author Johanna Hurwitz was inspired by an oil painting called *The Dutch Proverbs* (1646/4) by David Teniers II that depicts 45 proverbs and proverbial expressions on a large canvas very much in the tradition of Pieter Bruegel's famous painting *The Netherlandish Proverbs* (1559) with its over 100 proverbial scenes (Dundes and Stibbe 1981, Mieder 2004a): "A picture is worth a thousand words, but sometimes words can inspire a picture. On a trip to England, I saw a large painting at Belvoir Castle [at Grantham]. It depicted many proverbial scenes together on a single canvas. That painting sparked the idea for this book." As my wife and I did on our pilgrimage to Belvoir Castle some years ago, Hurwitz too must have bought a postcard of the picture at the museum shop that lists the proverbial phrases. In turn she showed it to the children's book illustrator Robert Rayevsky who adapted the 17th-century small-town painting to the metropolis of New York City with Teniers' small river becoming the East River. Altogether his picture is comprised of twenty proverb scenes, with the actual texts printed around the outside borders. The left side includes proverbs like "Don't cry over spilt milk," "Birds of a feather flock together," and "Too many cooks spoil the broth," while the right side features such proverbs as "Where there's smoke, there's fire," "An apple a day keeps the doctor away," and "Don't look a gift horse in the mouth." The proverb picture appears twice on the front and back inside cover pages, clearly entertaining children and adults alike in searching out the proverb scenes and gaining some understanding of their traditional wisdom. The inside of this oversize book (9x11) includes 22 proverbs with some of them like "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush" and "When the cat's away the mice will play" covering two whole pages. The proverbs are printed at the top or the bottom of the page in relatively small lettering without any explanations. This surely is a book that is intended primarily for viewing pleasure while at the same time introducing children to very well-known proverbs, with the one about "The pen is mightier than the sword" showing Benjamin Franklin at a lectern with a quill in hand and surrounded by children. This illustration serves as the introduction and is accompanied by a short preface that quite correctly states that Franklin is "known of having recorded many proverbs in a series of books called *Poor Richard Almanack*. Benjamin Franklin was aware that there was much for us to learn from the simple truths of proverbs" (p. 3). In other words, Hurwitz refrains from perpetuating the falsehood that Franklin coined dozens of proverbs that one hears and reads to this day, something that is especially the case for the apocryphal attachment of his name to the beautifully illustrated proverb "Early to bed, and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise" (pp. 24-25) that actually dates back to a late medieval Latin proverb (Barbour 1974, Mieder 1993: 98-134)

Brennan-Nelson, Denise. 2003. *My Momma Likes to Say*. Illustrations by Jane Monroe Donovan. Chelsea, Michigan: Sleeping Bear Press. 32 pp.

Brennan-Nelson, Denise. 2004. *My Teacher Likes to Say*. Illustrations by Jane Monroe Donovan. Chelsea, Michigan: Sleeping Bear Press. 32 pp.

Brennan-Nelson, Denise. 2007. *My Grandma Likes to Say*. Illustrations by Jane Monroe Donovan. Chelsea, Michigan: Sleeping Bear Press. 32 pp.

These somewhat oversized (10x10) books are proof of the proverb that all good things come in three! The collaborative work between the author Denise Brennan-Nelson and the illustrator Jane Monroe resulted in the poetic, prosaic, and pictorial explanation of about a dozen proverbs and proverbial expressions in each book. The children learn that they most likely have heard them from their mother, teacher, or grandmother. On a two-page spread the proverb is written in large letters at the top followed by some verses and in smaller print a few explanatory comments, with the wonderful colorful illustrations bringing it all to life. The first book presents proverbs like “Money doesn’t grow on trees” and proverbial expressions like “It’s raining cats and dogs” (the illustration of animals tumbling through the rain is also on the cover), and I was pleased to see a modern proverb included that might serve as an example of the *modus operandi* of these books:

“When life hands you lemons, make lemonade,”

My momma likes to say.
I’m not sure what she means
But I like it anyway.

If life gives me lemons
I’ll squeeze them good and hard,
Then add some sugar, stir it up
And sell it from our yard.

All of this is surrounded by several children preparing lemonade in a front yard to be sold to passersby, but in the upper right corner, in small print, is this additional information:

Andrew Carnegie (1835-1919) first said, “When fate hands us lemons, let us try to make lemonade.”

Lemons are very sour and yet they are used to make something very sweet and delicious – lemonade! This idiom suggests that we should take a difficult situation and turn it into something good.

Can you think of a time when you took a bad situation and turned it into something good?

[this is followed by eight lines of a lemonade recipe] (24-25)

All of this is written in such small print that I doubt that children would enjoy reading it. But perhaps this is meant for the parents to read and discuss with the children. I should also add that none of the books state anywhere what the age-

range of the children is that are being addressed. Finally, calling Andrew Carnegie the originator of the proverb is stretching things a bit. He helped to popularize it, with the earliest reference thus far being from 1910 (Doyle, Mieder, Shapiro 2012: 140). By the third book proverbial expressions and comparisons like "growing like a weed," "a horse of a different color," "being no spring chicken," and "hit the hay" outnumber proverbs like "When the cats away the mice will play" and "Where there's a will there's a way." One of my favorites is the verbal and pictorial treatment of the proverbial comparison "like a bull in a china shop" (16-17) that has been shown to have an international distribution from classical times to today in a number of variants including an elephant instead of the bull (Trokhimenko 1999).

Gregorich, Barbara. 2006. *Waltur [sic] Buys a Pig in a Poke and Other Stories*. Illustrations by Kristin Sorra. Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin. 54 pp.
 Gregorich, Barbara. 2007. *Waltur [sic] Paints Himself into a Corner and Other Stories*. Illustrations by Kristin Sorra. Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin. 48 pp.

These two books are very different from the others in that they teach or exemplify proverbs by stories with many colorful illustrations showing how Waltur the bear in company with his bear friends finds out the truth behind them. The first volume treats the three proverbs "Don't buy a pig in a poke," "Don't count your chickens before they're hatched," and "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink." Here are a few of the short prose lines printed as if they were poems of the first story:

A Pig in a Poke

The three friends went to the fair.
 "I will go on rides," said Darwin.
 "I will play games," said Matilda.
 "And I will buy a pig," said Waltur.

"Be careful," said Matilda.
 "Do not buy a pig in a poke."

"What's a poke?" asked Darwin.
 "A poke is a bag," Matilda answered.
 "You cannot see through a bag.
 You should not buy what
 You cannot see," she said.

Matilda went to play games.
 Darwin went to go on rides.
 Waltur went to buy a pet. (6-7)

And on it goes for more pages as Waltur finds his understanding and appreciation of the proverb. The second volume presents stories around "Don't put the cart before the horse", "Don't paint yourself into a corner," and "Let sleeping dogs lie" of which the first two would normally be considered as proverbial expressions that are rendered into proverbs of sorts by adding the negative imperative "Don't" element to them. But to be sure, the stories and illustrations are educational in an entertaining fashion, and children would surely enjoy having them read to them or reading them on their own while glancing at the pictures.

These then are the books that I have been able to collect over the years, leaving examples of similar books in German, Russian, and Spanish aside for now. Of course, there are other ways to teach proverbs to children bringing to mind a large framed colorful poster of a painting by the British artist William Belcher with the title *As the Saying Goes* (1973) that hangs in my office in our home. It contains 51 proverb scenes with captions for the obvious delight and edification of children. As in *The Netherlandish Proverbs* by Bruegel, a house is placed into an open landscape with a river running through it, with the various scenes and captions bringing to life such proverbs as "Cleanliness is next to godliness," "Too many cooks spoil the broth," "A rolling stone gathers no moss," "Look before you leap," "You can't have your cake and eat it too," and, befitting an English poster, "An Englishman's home is his castle" which is nowadays usually cited more generally as "A man's home is his castle." My wife and I remember fondly how our nephews and niece would stand in front of the picture enjoying the proverbial messages.

Observing children deal with proverbs can indeed be a lot of fun for adults. As they learn and understand them, it is of developmental interest to hear them utter them correctly in different contexts. But there are also those perennial lists prepared by elementary school teachers where children have been asked to complete truncated proverbs that they often do not yet know. We have all received such humorous lists via the internet, and I have quite a collection of them. Two of my favorites are "A rolling stone plays a guitar" and "A bird in the hand is warm" that clearly have some truth to them. And children also come up spontaneously with proverb-like statements that might just have it in them to become new proverbs, to wit such wisdom as "Parents have eyes in the backs of their heads," "You can't hide mashed potatoes in your hat," "Popping popcorn without a lid isn't smart," and "You can't trust dogs to watch your food" that H. Jackson Brown has collected in his richly illustrated book *Wit and Wisdom from the Peanut Butter Gang. A Collection of Wise Words from Young Hearts* (1994: 25, 52, 63, 64, see also Gash 1999, Knox 1925, Stark 1992). Adults throughout the world have coined plenty of proverbs about children and child-rearing (Palacios 1996, Reinsberg-Düringsfeld 1864), and so why should we not also look more seriously at children's very own proverbs? It certainly behooves folklorists and others to pay much more attention to children and proverbs not only from the dominant psycholinguistic approach but also by way of rigorous field research to find out when, how, and why children employ proverbs that they have learned in actual verbal communication. Teaching them traditional and modern proverbs,

not so much as moral maxims as was done in former times but rather as culturally relevant generalizations, still makes a lot of sense as they develop into responsible citizens with at least a little bit of help from the insights of the experienced wisdom of proverbial common-sense.

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